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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: OPPOSITION LABOUR PARTY ON COURSE TO VICTORY IN  
SEPTEMBER 3 NATIONAL ELECTION?

REF: KINGSTON 1288 (232000Z AUG 07)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (SBU) The passage of Hurricane Dean has failed to dampen the momentum of the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP), with Opposition Spokesman on Information Dwight Nelson predicting a landslide victory. Nelson told EmbOff that the People's National Party (PNP)'s attempt to gain lost ground through hurricane related handouts will fail, as the die has been cast. The JLP will be even more buoyed by latest opinion polls, which show the JLP moving ahead of the PNP. A number of analysts also have predicted a win for the JLP, given its superior election campaign. But despite the apparent odds, campaign member and former youth leader of the PNP Basil Waite maintains his Party will be returned to office. While his position may reflect bias, no one should write off the PNP: the Party has a history of coming from behind to win. End summary.

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Hurricane Will Not Disrupt Victory  
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2. (SBU) In the wake of Hurricane Dean, the Opposition Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) is certain it will reap electoral success when all the votes have been count on the evening of September 3. This confidence initially was subdued, as the JLP worried about losing momentum if the election were postponed well beyond the original date of August 27. In fact, Opposition Spokesman on Information Dwight Nelson told EmbOff that while the hurricane had not altered the standings, it had slowed his party's momentum. He said that not even the PNP's attempts to use the hurricane relief efforts to score political points would work this time around, as people had come to expect this kind of response after a disaster. "The whole element of surprise is therefore missing," Nelson continued. The JLP spokesman claimed the die had been cast, and not much would change in the days leading up to the elections. He said the JLP would spend the remaining days on the ground meeting with small groups and tightening its organization.

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Perceived PNP Disunity and Polls Buoy JLP  
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3. (SBU) The JLP's confidence also has been boosted by reports of disunity in the senior ranks of the PNP. Andrew Holness, Opposition Spokesman on Education, told EmbOff that one segment of the PNP, led by Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller (PSM), made a valiant attempt to have the election postponed long enough to make up lost ground. He said PSM's efforts were only thwarted by the opposition of senior Cabinet members led by Omar Davies, Peter Phillips, and

Maxine Henry-Wilson. Holness said this is not surprising, given that, in addition to being battle worn and wanting to see an end to electioneering, this grouping of the intelligentsia traditionally has been opposed to PSM leading the party. Additionally, the JLP is pleased with the 72.2 percent voter turnout by members of the security forces and election workers, who voted on August 28; it is not lost on the Opposition Party that a surge in voter turnout is an indication the ruling PNP is in trouble (Note: In the last four decades, no ruling party has won an election when voter turnout has exceeded 70 percent. End Note.).

4.(SBU) The JLP will be even more buoyed by the results of the latest opinion polls, particularly the one conducted by newspaper and PNP internal pollster Bill Johnson. While Johnson consistently has suggested that the momentum was with the JLP, his polls also consistently have shown the party lagging behind the PNP. However, his latest results show the JLP surging ahead. For the first time, his polls also show that Opposition Leader Bruce Golding has moved ahead of PSM as the person best suited to lead the country. Another pollster reports a statistical dead heat, while yet another predicts a landslide victory for the JLP. It is this poll which appears to resonate most with the JLP; of Jamaica's 60 parliamentary seats, Nelson's conservative estimate of the JLP's total has increased from 34 a month ago to 40. He said the poll results are no surprise, as the JLP is gaining traction among younger voters and formerly disenchanted JLP supporters. As far as Holness is concerned, the PNP already has maximized support among its hard core, and will not get much more going forward.

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Analysts Also Predicting JLP Win  
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15. But the single biggest boost for the JLP seems to be coming from

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analysts, who think only a huge blunder can change the JLP's course to victory. Many analysts are united in the view that the PNP has surrendered the election to the JLP because of its strategic mismanagement of the campaign. The branding of the once popular PSM as the face of the PNP, and the ruling party's use of the "not changing course" slogan in the face of glaring problems such as high crime and unemployment and low growth, have been identified as fundamental errors. Perceptions of disunity following the bitter internal elections 19 months ago have only served to exacerbate the challenges. The bungling associated with the enactment of the state of emergency following the hurricane and the divisiveness surrounding the new date for the election also have been highlighted. According to the analysts, the issue of incumbency, and the prospect of the PNP extending its time in office to 23 years, is also a major militating factor.

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But PNP Not Perturbed  
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16. Yet the PNP does not appear to be disturbed, at least publicly, by the turn of events. In fact, the Party has beefed up its advertising campaign in the last week, and now is matching or outstripping the JLP for media coverage. Basil Waite, former PNP youth leader and current campaign organizer, told EmbOff that he is not perturbed by the apparent popularity of the JLP, and by all indications his Party will be returned to office on September 3. When asked about the polls, Waite said they had been monitoring the trends and he therefore had not been surprised that the JLP had moved ahead. That said, he thought this would only give the JLP a psychological boost, for which the PNP had prepared. However, Waite's position on the poll was not supported by campaign organizer Danny Roberts of the PNP affiliated National Workers Union. According to Roberts, Bill Johnson, the PNP internal pollster, lacks credibility because of his poor track record in Bahamas and St. Lucia. Roberts said that the party has done 77 constituency polls, and the clear trend is a swing to the PNP. He said the PNP was on track to recapture or surpass its 34 seats in Parliament. He even downplayed the impact of the hurricane, despite admitting the slow

pace of the relief effort.

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Comment  
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7.(SBU) From all indications, the JLP appears to be running a well organized and strategic campaign, based on a clear message of change. This message appears to resonate with the electorate, and thus it is not surprising that the polls show younger voters, in particular, gravitating toward the JLP, putting it in the ascendancy. Unlike previous campaigns, in this one the JLP also appears firmly united around its leader and, in a strange turn of events, the traditionally more united PNP shows signs of divisiveness. Against this background, unless the JLP makes a huge blunder going forward, the momentum apparently will continue in its favor. Nevertheless, with the PNP pumping up its election machinery and with hurricane relief efforts improving, only a brave soul would write off the PNP: the Party has a history of coming from behind at the last moment to win. This time, the PNP's proverbial nine lives will be severely tested; no ruling party has been able to win a majority in any election following a hurricane.  
End Comment.

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